

***International Education: China’s Last Emperor, Pu Yi***

This lesson on the last imperial leader of China should take 3-4 days. 2-3 days to view the motion picture, The Last Emperor, and 1 day to complete the video review.

**I. Content:**

I want my students to understand (or be able to):

- A. The history of early 20<sup>th</sup> century China.
- B. The events surrounding the Nationalist takeover of China.
- C. The role Japan played in the history of early 20<sup>th</sup> century China.
- D. The events surrounding the Communist takeover of China.

**II. Prerequisites:**

In order to fully appreciate this lesson, the student must know (or be experienced in):

- A. Moderate knowledge of the history of Chinese dynastic rulers.
- B. The degree to which emperors were historically revered in China.
- C. Limited biographic information on Pu Yi (handout).

**III. Instructional Objective(s):**

The student will:

- A. Take classroom notes on basic information of Chinese emperors (Instructor’s discretion on the depth).
- B. Read the biographical handout on China’s last emperor, Henry Pu Yi.
- C. View the motion picture, The Last Emperor.

**IV. Materials and Equipment**

*Teacher:* A/V equipment, permission slips for viewing a PG-13 movie, video review forms.

*Student:* Writing utensils.

**V. Instructional Procedure:**

- A. I will introduce the lesson by giving the students information on the history of Chinese dynastic leaders.
- B. After giving students information on Chinese emperors, give the students the biographical handout of China’s last emperor, Pu Yi.
- C. Students will read the handout.
- D. Begin showing the motion picture, The Last Emperor.
- E. After conclusion of the movie, ask the students if there are any questions they might have concerning the content of the movie (ie. Questions on Chinese customs, history, vocabulary used in the movie, etc.).

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- F. Hand out video review form to be completed by the students (amount of time given for the students to complete is at the discretion of the instructor).

**VI. Assessment / Evaluation:**

- A. Students will complete the video review assignment.

**VII. Idaho Achievement Standards:**

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|---------------|--|
| 6-9.WHC.1.9.4 | Describe how different religious beliefs were sources of conflict.   |
| 6-9.WHC.4.4.2 | Analyze the various political philosophies which shaped western civilization including the City-State, Monarchy, Republic, Nation-State, and Democracy.  |
| 6-9.WHC.5.1.1 | Explain common reasons and consequences for the breakdown of order among nation-states, such as conflicts about national interests, ethnicity, and religion; competition for resources and territory; the absence of effective means to enforce international law. |

**VIII. Follow Up or Extension Activities:**

- A. Possible discussion of the movie before or after assigning the video review.  
B. Possible project on recreating the Forbidden City.  
C. Possible in-class debate on who had the most legitimacy in the ruling of China, the imperialists, nationalists, or the communists.

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**The Last Emperor of China**

**The Child Emperor**

The last emperor of China was Henry P’u Yi, pronounced “Poo yee.” His name is also sometimes spelled P’u-i, Puyi, Pu-Yi or Buyi.

P’u Yi was a member of the Ch’ing (or Qing) Dynasty – a Manchu. The Manchus were originally nomads from Manchuria, northeast of China. They conquered China in 1644, but kept themselves largely separated from the Chinese. They retained their own language and fashions, lived apart, and married other Manchus. For a long time Chinese people weren’t even permitted to settle in the Manchu homeland.

By the time P’u Yi was born on February 7, 1906, the Ch’ing Dynasty was in trouble. China had come to be dominated by foreign powers, mainly Westerners. The country was ruled by Dowager Empress Tzu Hsi (or Cixi) who had imprisoned the nominal emperor, Kuang Hsu, for conspiring against her. On her deathbed the empress named young P’u Yi – the son of the imprisoned emperor’s brother – to succeed her. To make sure the current emperor didn’t interfere in her plans, it is said, she had him poisoned. P’u Yi was nearly three years old when the dowager empress died. As emperor he was given the reign name Hsuan Tung.

P’u Yi’s father, Prince Ch’un, served as his son’s regent. The prince disliked politics, and dissidents considered him weak. There was great resentment in China against foreigners and the Manchu government, and in 1911 rebellion swept through the country, forcing Prince Ch’un to resign as regent. Chinese general Yuan Shih k’ai took over the government. He hoped to start his own ruling dynasty and suggested that P’u Yi should abdicate. Fearing the consequences if they refused, the Manchu Grand Council agreed, and on February 12, 1912, the five-year old emperor renounced his throne. He continued to live in the Forbidden City and was treated with enormous respect.

**P’u Yi’s life in the Forbidden City**

The Forbidden City is located on Tiananmen Square in Beijing (then called Peking in the Western world). Commoners were not allowed to enter the city, which was surrounded by 35-foot walls and a moat. The city was built between 1406 and 1420 by the Ming emperors. It contains the palaces of 24 Ming and Ch’ing emperors, as well as white-marble terraces, gardens, and shrines, encompassing 250 acres and over 9,000 rooms. The city’s walls are red and the roof is gold – the colors of the imperial court. No one was allowed to use the color yellow except the emperor. Almost everything around him was yellow: the floor tiles, the dishes, even his pillow cases and blankets.

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The Forbidden City was run by eunuchs, and P’u Yi didn’t meet another child until he was seven when his brother and sister visited him. The children played hide and seek and had a good time until P’u Yi noticed the color of the lining of his brother’s sleeve. It was yellow! Outraged, P’u Yi screamed at his brother, who stood at attention and said, “It isn’t yellow, sire. It is apricot, Your Imperial Majesty.”

Although P’u Yi was no longer emperor, everyone knelt and kowtowed to him, including his parents, whom he rarely saw. He became emperor at age three and didn’t see his mother again until he was 10. His upbringing was supervised by four consorts of previous emperors. In his own words, “Although I had many mothers, I never knew motherly love.” His real mother argued with the consorts about how to raise P’u Yi. After one of these arguments she swallowed opium and died. P’u Yi was about 13 at the time. Pu Yi’s father, Prince Ch’un, visited his son every two months and never stayed for more than two minutes.

The eunuchs also treated P’u Yi with great formality. Everywhere he went in the Forbidden City he was accompanied by a huge procession. He couldn’t take a simple stroll without his entourage following him with food, medicine and clothing. He had no set meal times. When he wanted to eat he commanded, “Bring the food!” and immediately the eunuchs brought him six tables full of food: two tables of main dishes, one table of vegetables, and three tables of rice and cakes. He was “limited” to 25 dishes per meal; previous emperors had been served at least 100 dishes. The Forbidden City’s cooks prepared food constantly, day and night, so that it would be ready at P’u Yi’s whim.

When P’u Yi was in a bad mood he ordered eunuchs flogged in his presence. Once, as an adult, he allegedly had a boy beaten for running away – and the boy died.

**The Restoration**

In 1917 when P’u Yi was 9, a warlord named Chang Hsun decided to restore him to the throne. Chang’s army surrounded Peking, and P’u Yi released a decree stating that he was the emperor once again. Leaders of the republican government accused the monarchists of using P’u Yi as a puppet, which, of course, he was.

Six days after P’u Yi’s restoration a plane dropped three bombs on the Forbidden City. It was the first air raid in Chinese history. P’u Yi was in his classroom when he heard an explosion. He said later, “I was so terrified that I shook all over, and the color drained from my tutors’ faces.” One bomb damaged a lotus pond and another injured a sedan-

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chair carrier. The third bomb fell amid a group of eunuchs who were gambling, but didn't explode. Then the sound of gunfire was heard approaching the Forbidden City.

P'u Yi's supporters abandoned him, and once again he lost his throne. He remained in the Forbidden City, and his life went on much as it had before.

#### **Reginald Johnston**

P'u Yi received an uneven education. He studied classics, history and poetry, but learned no math, geography or science. His lessons were in Chinese and Manchu. At age 13 he started studying English.

The Manchus still hoped to restore P'u Yi to his throne, and they wanted him to have contact with Western powers who might be able to help them achieve their goal. So they asked a senior official of the British Colonial Office to become P'u Yi's English tutor. His name was Reginald Johnston. He wasn't really a teacher – his real job was to act as a go-between for P'u Yi and the British government. However, he did help P'u Yi learn to speak English, and he and the boy became close friends.

P'u Yi was heavily influenced by Johnston and developed a fascination for Western things. He asked Johnston to help him pick an English name for himself. Johnston gave him a list of names of British kings, and P'u Yi chose Henry, which is why you can find the last emperor of China listed in encyclopedias as Henry P'u Yi.

It was Johnston who first noticed that P'u Yi needed glasses. P'u Yi's advisors objected, considering glasses too Western for a Chinese emperor, but P'u Yi overruled them and wore glasses the rest of his life.

#### **P'u Yi as a Teenager**

As P'u Yi learned more about the world, he realized that he was a prisoner in the Forbidden City. At the age of 15 he tried to escape by bribing the guards at the gate. They took his money, then betrayed him. He never made it outside the palace walls.

When P'u Yi was 16 his advisors decided that it was time for him to marry. They gave him photos of four Manchu girls and told him to pick one. The pictures weren't clear and he couldn't really tell what the girls looked like, but he picked a 13-year old girl named Wen Hsiu. His advisors were displeased, and told him that Wen Hsiu was too ugly to be empress. At their insistence he picked another bride, a very beautiful girl his own age. She was Wan Jung, later known as Elizabeth.

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Elizabeth became his official wife and Wen Hsiu, his first choice, became his consort. On the night of his wedding to Elizabeth, P’u Yi panicked and fled from their bedroom; it’s possible that he never consummated his marriages. He had no children. Many years later his sister-in-law, Hiro Saga, wrote that as an adult P’u Yi kept a pageboy as his concubine. Hiro also claimed that “P’u Yi once took a 12-year old girl as a consort, but the girl ran away after a few days.

**P’u Yi Leaves the Forbidden City**

In 1924 the army of another warlord, Feng Yu-hsiang, surrounded the Forbidden City. But this warlord did not want to restore P’u Yi to his throne. Feng was both a Communist and a Christian, and an enemy of the Manchus. P’u Yi was forced to leave the Forbidden City for the first time since becoming emperor. He took with him his imperial seal and a suitcase filled with precious stones.

The teenaged former emperor traveled by limousine to the mansion of his father, Prince Ch’un. There one of Feng’s men shook his hand and called him Mr. P’u Yi. For the first time in his life, P’u Yi was being treated as an ordinary citizen – and he loved it. “I had no freedom as emperor. Now I have found my freedom!” he is said to have exclaimed.

But he was still a prisoner, and he had not given up his dream of regaining the throne. Soon Reginald Johnston helped him escape to the Japanese legation. Apparently the British hoped that the Japanese would make P’u Yi the emperor of Manchuria, thereby causing trouble between Japan and Manchuria.

P’u Yi’s wives and staff joined him at the Japanese compound in Peking. Later they moved to Tientsin, on the coast of China, where the Japanese had a lot of power. P’u Yi rented a mansion called Chang Garden and set up his court there. He remained there for years, plotting to regain his throne. Tientsin was a cosmopolitan city and P’u Yi and his wife Elizabeth had busy social lives. Their private relationship was very cold. Elizabeth called her husband “eunuch.” P’u Yi got along better with his consort, Wen Hsiu. But Wen Hsiu eventually demanded a divorce, possibly because she was jealous of Elizabeth’s position as empress. Divorce was unprecedented in the history of the imperial family, but P’u Yi didn’t want a public scandal, so he agreed. Wen Hsui returned to Peking. She lived until 1950, and never remarried.

In 1928 the tombs of some of P’u Yi’s ancestors, including Dowager Empress Tzu Hsi, were looted by revolutionaries. P’u Yi, who worshipped his ancestors, was extremely upset. From then on he hated the Chinese.

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**Emperor of Manchukuo**

In 1931 the Japanese army invaded Manchuria. At that time the Japanese military and the Japanese government were at odds. The government had never been happy about P'u Yi's association with the Japanese military, and it wasn't too happy about the invasion of Manchuria, either. But P'u Yi was delighted. He accepted the army's offer to smuggle him into Manchuria. One night he put on a Japanese military uniform and hid in the trunk of a car. He was taken to a river where he boarded a boat which, unknown to him, was rigged to explode if attacked by the Chinese. But he safely reached the open sea and boarded a Japanese ship which took him to Manchuria.

Elizabeth joined him there later, but she and P'u Yi spent little time together. She had an affair with a guard and P'u Yi punished her by confining her to her rooms. Eventually the empress became an opium addict. She deteriorated mentally and physically. Once, at a banquet, she grabbed a piece of turkey and tore into it like a wild animal. Her brother tried to cover up the guests' embarrassment by laughing and doing the same thing. But it was obvious that Elizabeth was losing her mind.

The Japanese set up a new country in Manchuria called Manchukuo. They made P'u Yi the chief executive, which angered him – he wanted to be emperor. The Chinese government called Manchukuo a fake country and P'u Yi a traitor to China. The only major countries to recognize Manchukuo's existence were Japan, Italy and Germany.

It was 1934 before the Japanese agreed to make P'u Yi the Emperor of Manchukuo. He took the reign title K'ang Teh, or “Tranquility and Virtue.” The Japanese provided him with a palace and money, and also made all the decisions for him. The emperor was a figurehead with very little say even over his personal life. The Japanese pressured him and his brother to marry Japanese women, which, of course, would put Japanese spies inside P'u Yi's family. P'u Yi resisted by taking a new Manchu consort named Yu-ling, or “Jade Years.” But his brother, P'u Chieh, gave in and married Hiro Saga, the daughter of a Japanese nobleman. They had two daughters.

Six years after her marriage to P'u Yi, Yu-ling died. P'u Yi believed that the Japanese had poisoned her. Once again he was asked to take a Japanese wife. Finally he agreed to marry a Manchurian girl from a Japanese-run school. Once more he was given photographs and told to choose a bride. He picked a 15-year old, thinking that she might be less indoctrinated by the Japanese than an older girl. Her name was Li Yuqin or Yu-Ch'in, “Jade Lute.”

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The Japanese also ordered P'u Yi to convert to Shintoism. Again he quietly rebelled. Publicly he embraced the Japanese religion, but secretly he became such a devout Buddhist that he refused to let his servants kill flies.

During World War II Japan developed Manchukuo as a military-industrial base. At the end of the war Soviet forces invaded Manchuria. Again P'u Yi fled his palace with only a suitcase of jewels and an imperial seal. He retreated to a small town with his family and entourage. When he learned of Japan's surrender he abdicated the throne of Manchukuo. Manchuria was eventually returned to Chinese control.

#### **P'u Yi in Russia**

After his abdication the Soviets told P'u Yi that he would be flown to Japan, and could select eight people to accompany him. He picked his brother, three nephews, two brothers-in-law, a doctor, and a servant. He left his wives behind, and never saw Elizabeth again. The beautiful drug-addicted empress died in a Chinese prison at the age of 40. Jade Lute eventually went to work in a library in her hometown of Changchun. In 1958 she divorced P'u Yi and remarried. She died in Changchun in 2001 of cirrhosis of the liver.

P'u Yi and his attendants were not taken to Japan, as they had been promised. Instead they were flown to the USSR and kept under house arrest. P'u Yi was treated very well; apparently Stalin thought that the former emperor might be useful to the Soviets later. In 1946 P'u Yi was taken to Tokyo to testify against Japanese war criminals who had been his allies. He insisted that he had not acted freely in Manchukuo, but as a helpless puppet of the Japanese. After the trial he spent another four years in the custody of the Soviets. He took up gardening at this time.

#### **The Emperor Returns to China**

At last, in 1950, the Soviets relinquished control of P'u Yi. He was forced to leave his comfortable Russian villa and return to China, where he was sent at once to a prison camp. He remained there for nine years. He slept in a cell with other prisoners, made his own bed, did menial labor, and endured constant brainwashing. The Communists made him betray his Buddhist beliefs by killing flies and mice. P'u Yi went along meekly with his captors' demands, knowing that he must do what he was told if he hoped to ever be freed. After a while he voluntarily surrendered his imperial seal to the Communist government.



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In December of 1959 he was finally released. He was in his 50s. He went to live with his family in his father’s house in Peking. The Forbidden City was now open to the public and the former emperor visited it as an ordinary citizen.

But P’u Yi was still a puppet. The Chinese government assigned him to work in the gardens of the Academy of Sciences’ Institute of Botany. He was kept busy making public appearances on the government’s behalf, and was given government posts. With the government’s encouragement he wrote his autobiography. In 1962 Chairman Mao arranged for P’u Yi to marry a Communist Party member, Li Shu-hsien (or Li Shuxian), who had been a nurse in a hospital where Pu Yi was treated during his imprisonment by the communists. It was the first time in history that a Manchu emperor married a Chinese woman. (She died of lung cancer in 1997 at the age of 72.)

In 1965 Chairman Mao called for a Cultural Revolution in China. He wanted to get rid of intellectuals who opposed him. When P’u Yi died in 1967 it was rumored that he had been murdered by revolutionaries. But in fact he probably died of cancer. The official report of his death said that he had suffered from cancer of the kidney, uremia, and heart disease. China is still Communist, and at this point it seems unlikely that its monarch will be restored.

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### Video Reviews

Completing a Video Review in World History will help students achieve the following objectives:

1. Become Effective Writers
2. Develop Substantive Knowledge About a Topic
3. Obtain an Understanding of the Nature and Use of Historical Research
4. Develop the Ability to Think Critically About the Work of Others

A Video Review goes beyond the mere summarizing of a movie or video. It entails an inquiry into the overall worth of the piece, and therefore assumes an evaluative nature. There are five major steps in preparing an Article Review:

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

After viewing the assigned video, briefly discuss its purpose. Determining the purpose is actually a 2-part analysis.

First, what was the motivation behind making the video or movie? (Was it a political statement, intended for educational purposes, entertainment, etc?)

Second, what is the goal in terms of the message of the video or movie? What do the makers of the video or movie want you to come away with after viewing it?

#### **2. CRITICAL SUMMARY**

What is the main idea of the video? To demonstrate a clear understanding of the video's main point(s), the video's major contentions must be explained in your own words.

Summarize the video. Cite important parts of the video that focus on the message the video is trying to send?

Although this will probably be the longest part of your Article Review, your paper should not become a mere summary WITHOUT some sort of analysis on your part.

#### **3. HISTORICAL RELATIONSHIP**

Discuss the ways in which the video contributes to your understanding of the historical period it discusses. Be very specific, noting how the video added to your knowledge of the historical period. Discuss what the video teaches you that the textbook and class lectures/discussion did not. Identify ways that the

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information presented in the video changed your understanding of the historical period being discussed.

**4. CONCLUSION**

Briefly discuss the major strengths and weaknesses of the video. (This section bears similarity to a movie critic's analysis of a film.)

Does it fit into the prevailing interpretation or consensus about the topic? (Does it “shake things up” in terms of what is currently the “status quo” understanding about the issue(s) it discussed?)

Is this information different from what you previously learned? If so, how? (This could summarize some of your comments in Section 3 above.)

Finally, discuss the overall worth of the video as it contributed to your understanding of this year's World History class.

**5. WRITING THE REVIEW – Follow this format precisely!**

A. At the top of the page, give the title of the video.

B. Type the review, double-spaced. Do not exceed three pages.